

A REPORT OF LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL HEALTH IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Prepared by

Mayor's Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Affairs

**Government of the District of Columbia
Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor**

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Executive Summary:

The District of Columbia has one of the highest percentages of same-sex unmarried couples in the nation. The purpose of this report is to present data from the District of Columbia's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) surveys and prompt discussion about how to improve health outcomes in the GLBT community in Washington, DC.

Key Findings:

- Gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents were more likely to rate their overall health as good, very good or excellent.
- Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report smoking some days and smoking every day.
- Gay and lesbian respondents were slightly more likely and bisexual/other respondents were much more likely to report being binge drinkers.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents were more likely to report having an HIV test and much more likely to answer yes to questions that indicated they engage in risky behavior for contracting HIV.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents were more likely to report one or more days of bad mental health.
- A higher percentage of white respondents identified as gay or lesbian than respondents of people of color communities.
- Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report being neither overweight or obese and more likely to report meeting requirements for moderate and vigorous physical activity.

Introduction:

The District of Columbia has one of the highest percentages of same-sex unmarried couples in the nation.¹ Major health issues for the GLBT community are sexually transmitted infections including HIV, depression, tobacco use, as well as alcohol and substance abuse.² Factors that contribute to these outcomes include the impact of homophobia, stigma and the absence of culturally relevant prevention and treatment public health initiatives. While recent HIV/AIDS surveillance reports by the District of Columbia Department of Health (DOH) have focused on rate of HIV infection among men who have sex with men, there is a need for more specific data collected about the overall health of the GLBT community in the District. In order to gather additional information concerning the health of gay, lesbian and bisexual residents, questions about sexual orientation were included in recent Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) surveys. The purpose of this report is to present data from the 2005 and 2007 surveys and prompt discussion about how to improve health outcomes in the GLBT community in Washington, DC.

Methodology:

The BRFSS is a cross-sectional telephone survey conducted by state health departments with technical and methodological assistance provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Every year, the District conducts monthly telephone surveillance using a standardized questionnaire to determine the distribution of risk behaviors and health practices among non-institutionalized adults. The District forwards the responses to the CDC, where the monthly data are aggregated for each state. BRFSS interviewers ask questions related to behaviors that are associated with preventable, chronic diseases, injuries, and infectious diseases.

Over 350,000 adults are interviewed across the country each year, making this instrument the largest telephone health survey in the world. States use BRFSS data to identify emerging health problems, establish and track health objectives, in addition to conceptualizing, developing and evaluating sound and relevant public health initiatives.

Sampling weights provided by the D.C. Department of Health were used to address different probabilities of selection and survey participation. Surveys were conducted in English.

Findings:

In 2005 and 2007, a combined 6,218 residents in the District participated in the BRFSS survey. Almost 90% of the respondents identified as heterosexual, 4.5% of the respondents identified as gay or lesbian and 2.3% identified as bisexual or other. Data yielded from the survey provides insight into the general health of the GLBT community. Here is a synopsis of some of the additional findings.

- 8.3% of male respondents self identified as gay, 2.0% of female respondents self identified as lesbian, 2.3% of male respondents self identified as bisexual/other and 2.2% of female respondents identified as bisexual/other.
- 9.0% of white respondents, 2.0% of African-American respondents and 5.3% of Hispanic respondents identified as gay or lesbian.

¹ Williams Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. *Same-Sex Spouses and Unmarried Partners in the American Community Survey, 2008*.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health webpage*.

- 2.0% of white respondents, 2.2% of African-American respondents and 4.8% of Hispanic respondents identified as bisexual or other.
- 7.9% of the respondents making over \$75,000 identified as gay or lesbian and 1.4% of respondents making over \$75,000 identified as bisexual or other.
- Gay and lesbian respondents were less likely to report having a routine check up in the past year.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual/other respondents were less likely to report having high blood pressure.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual/other respondents were more likely to report having a flu shot

General Health

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents were more likely to rate their health as good, very good or excellent.

- 93.4% gay and lesbian respondents rated their health as good, very good or excellent compared to 86.9% of heterosexual and 86.3% bisexual respondents
- In the 30 days leading up to the survey, 68.1% of gay and lesbians and 64.3% of bisexual/others respondents reported having no days where their physical health was not good compared to 65.5% of heterosexual respondents
- 39.5% of gay and lesbian and 37.9% of bisexual/other respondents have had the flu shot in the past year compared to 32.4% of heterosexual respondents.

Access to Care

Gay and lesbian respondents were less likely to report having a routine check up in the past year.

- 68.6% of gay and lesbian respondents reported having a routine check up in the past year as compared to 85.2% of bisexual/other and 73.6% of heterosexual respondents
- 93.3% of gay and lesbian respondents reported having health care coverage as compared to 90.0% of bisexual/other and 91.1% of heterosexual respondents.

Mental Health

Gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents were more likely to report one or more days of bad mental health in the month leading up to the survey.

Bisexual/Other respondents were more likely to report being very dissatisfied with their lives.

- 39.8% of gay and lesbian and 45.7% of bisexual/other respondents reported having one or more days of bad mental health days in the 30 days prior to the survey compared to 31.3% of heterosexual respondents.
- 94.3% of gay and lesbian and 94.1% of heterosexual respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied with their lives compared to 88.9% of bisexual/other respondents
- 2.8% of bisexual/other respondents reported being very dissatisfied with their lives compared to .2% of gay and lesbian and .9% of heterosexual respondents

- 80.6% of gay and lesbian respondents reported usually or always getting the emotional support they need as compared to 76.4% of heterosexual and 66.1% of bisexual/other respondents.

Obesity/Exercise

Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report being neither overweight or obese and more likely to report meeting requirements for moderate and vigorous physical activity.

- 51.4% of gay and lesbian and 46.2% of bisexual/other respondents reported that they are neither overweight nor obese compared to 44.4% of heterosexual respondents, 52.1% of gay and lesbian respondents, and 46.6% of bisexual/other respondents reported meeting the recommendations for moderate physical activity compared to 38.6% of heterosexual respondents.
- 54.5 % of gay and lesbian respondents and 33.7% of bisexual respondents reported meeting recommendations for vigorous physical activity compared to 30.0% of heterosexual respondents.

Blood Pressure/Cholesterol

Gay, lesbian and bisexual/other respondents were less likely to report having high blood pressure.

- 16.7% of gay and lesbian and 22.7% of bisexual/other respondents have been told they had high blood pressure compared to 28.8% of heterosexual respondents.
- 91.8% of gay and lesbian respondents reported having their blood cholesterol levels checked compared to 86.2% of bisexual/other and 85.4% of heterosexual respondents.
- 69.9 % of gay and lesbian respondents, reported having their cholesterol levels checked within the past year compared to 72.9% of bisexual/other respondents and 74.3% of heterosexual respondents
- 33.9% of gay and lesbian respondents and 33.6% of heterosexual respondents had been told they have high cholesterol.

Alcohol/Tobacco Use

Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report smoking some days and smoking every day. Bisexual/other respondents were more likely to report being heavy drinkers. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual/other respondents were more likely to report being binge drinkers.

- 15.1% of gay and lesbian respondents reported smoking everyday compared to 11.0% of heterosexual respondents
- 7.6% of gay and lesbian respondents report smoking some days compared to 6.8% of heterosexual.
- 7.6% of bisexual/other respondents reported being heavy drinkers compared to 5.2% of heterosexual and 4.3% of gay and lesbian respondents

- 28.6% of bisexual/other respondents reported binge drinking compared to 16.3% of gay and lesbian and 15.8% of heterosexual respondents.

HIV Testing/Risk Behavior

Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely to report having an HIV test and much more likely to answer yes to questions that indicated they engage in risky behavior for contracting HIV.

- 90.8% of gay and lesbian respondents reported being tested for HIV compared to 64.9% of heterosexual respondents.
- 23.6% of gay and lesbian, 12.6% of bisexual/other respondents and 5.1% of heterosexual respondents answered yes to having engaged in one or more of the following behaviors that have been identified as increasing the risk for contracting the HIV virus in the past year:
 - Intravenous drugs in the past year
 - treatment for a sexually transmitted or venereal disease
 - given or received money or drugs in exchange for sex
 - anal sex without a condom in the past year

(Note: BRFFS does not include unprotected penile/vaginal intercourse in the list of risky behaviors it considers.)

Limitations:

There are some limitations to the data in this report. The data is self-reported and there are no additional level sources of data (such as hospital discharge or outpatient) to confirm the findings. Also, the interviews were done in English so individuals with limited English proficiency did not participate. A higher percentage of white respondents self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual than non whites. Some research has indicated that a perceived higher level of stigma in communities of color make it less likely that those individuals self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual.³ There was insufficient data to conduct other comparison by race, gender or other factors and there were no questions asked about transgender residents.

Conclusion:

This report is the first to present population-based estimates of health by sexual orientation. GLB respondents were more likely to exercise, have lower blood pressure and to take some routine health precautions like having a flu shot and having cholesterol and blood pressure checked on a regular basis. GLB respondents also had more days of poor mental health, smoked more and had slightly increased rates of binge drinking. These findings are consistent with the growing body of research on GLB health.

It should be noted that the District of Columbia is making investments in the health of the GLBT community. The Department of Health currently provides GLB specific funding for HIV/STD reduction, smoking cessation and recently funded a three year study of obesity in the lesbian community. This report marks a continuation of a fair, balanced and enlightened process for addressing emerging issues in public health policy as it relates to GLBT people in the District. The Department of Health and Mayor's Office of GLBT Affairs will continue conversations with community members, policy makers and health care providers around developing strategies to improve health outcomes and data collection yielding policy and practice recommendations.

³ Virginia Commonwealth University. *Differences in disclosure of sexuality among African American and White gay/bisexual men: implications for HIV/AIDS prevention*

**Sexual Orientation
Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Data
2005 and 2007 Years Summed**

Demographics

Sexual Orientation by Gender				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Total	6218	92.8	4.9	2.3
Male	2412	89.3	8.3	2.4
Female	3806	95.8	2.0	2.2
Sexual Orientation by Age				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
18-24	260	92.6	3.7	3.7
25-34	1020	92.4	5.7	1.9
35-44	1181	90.1	6.2	3.7
45-54	1191	91.5	6.7	1.8
55-64	1198	94.9	4.3	0.8
65 or older	1368	97.2	1.0	1.7
Sexual Orientation by Race				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Caucasian	3004	89.0	9.0	2.0
African American	2526	95.8	2.0	2.2
Hispanic	310	89.9	5.3	4.8
Other	281	93.5	5.2	1.3
Sexual Orientation by Income				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Less than \$15,000	480	93.4	2.5	4.1
\$15,000-\$24,999	639	94.9	2.9	2.2
\$25,000-\$34,999	478	94.0	1.7	4.3
\$35,000-\$49,999	691	94.7	2.8	2.5
\$50,000-\$74,999	839	92.1	5.7	2.2
\$75,000 or more	2502	90.7	7.9	1.4
Sexual Orientation by Marital Status				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Married	2003	98.9	0.3	0.9
Divorced	877	96.2	2.2	1.7
Widowed	647	97.1	0.9	1.9
Separated	202	95.5	0.4	4.1
Never married	2073	88.5	7.8	3.8
Member of an unmarried couple	373	74.3	22.6	3.0
Sexual Orientation by Education				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Less than high school	443	95.3	2.4	2.3
High school graduate	929	95.3	1.2	3.5
Some college	1021	92.3	4.4	3.3
Graduate	3816	91.7	6.8	1.6

Sexual Orientation by Employment				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Employed	3302	92.1	6.0	1.9
Self-employed	616	91.5	6.1	2.4
Out of work	302	89.5	6.9	3.6
Homemaker	203	97.4	0.7	1.9
Student	209	93.0	2.3	4.7
Retired	1300	97.2	1.7	1.1
Unable to work	262	90.1	3.5	6.4
Sexual Orientation by Ward				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Ward 1	438	84.4	13.8	1.8
Ward 2	482	90.3	8.7	1.0
Ward 3	967	94.0	3.4	2.5
Ward 4	783	94.5	4.1	1.4
Ward 5	540	92.1	5.1	2.8
Ward 6	632	89.2	8.1	2.7
Ward 7	562	96.0	1.9	2.1
Ward 8	408	96.2	0.6	3.2

General Health

Sexual Orientation by General Health				
Would you say that in general your health is				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Excellent	1685	26.2	39.5	25.8
Very good	2112	34.7	32.6	24.6
Good	1593	26.0	21.3	35.8
Fair	558	9.6	4.9	10.4
Poor	228	3.5	1.6	3.3

Health Care Coverage

Sexual Orientation by Health Care Coverage				
Do you have health coverage				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	5825	91.1	93.8	92.8
No	382	8.9	6.2	7.2

Sexual Orientation by Health Care Coverage				
Do you have one person you think of as your personal doctor or health care provider?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes, only one	4751	71.7	79.5	73.8
More than one	514	8.3	4.9	8.4
No	942	19.9	15.6	17.7

Sexual Orientation by Health Care Coverage				
Was there a time in the past 12 months when you needed to see a doctor but could not because of cost?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	460	9.0	3.3	13.1
No	5747	91.0	96.7	86.9

Sexual Orientation by Health Care Coverage				
About how long has it been since you last visited a doctor for a routine checkup?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Within the past year	2014	73.6	68.6	85.2
Within the past 2 years	347	13.3	17.5	7.7
Within the past 5 years	186	7.3	8.3	7.1
5 or more years ago	125	5.1	5.7	0
Never	11	*	*	*
Exercise				
Sexual Orientation by Exercise				
During the past month, other than your regular job, did you participate in any physical activities or exercises such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	5027	78.6	90.0	79.3
No	1189	21.4	10.0	20.7
Sexual Orientation by Hypertension Awareness				
Have you ever been told by a doctor, nurse or other health professional that you have high blood pressure?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	1934	28.8	16.2	22.7
Yes, but pregnant	54	0.9	0	1.0
No	4143	69.2	82.6	76.3
Borderline high	79	1.1	1.2	0
Cholesterol Awareness				
Sexual Orientation by Cholesterol Awareness				
Blood cholesterol is a fatty substance found in the blood. Have you ever had your blood cholesterol checked?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	5529	85.4	91.8	86.2
No	583	14.6	8.2	13.8
Sexual Orientation by Cholesterol Awareness				
About how long has it been since you last had your blood cholesterol checked?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Within the past year	4147	74.3	69.6	72.9
Within the past 2 years	729	13.3	18.5	15.9
Within the past 5 years	421	8.9	9.2	11.2
5 or more years ago	174	3.4	2.6	0
Sexual Orientation by Cholesterol Awareness				
Have you ever been told by a doctor, nurse or other health professional that your blood cholesterol is high?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	2025	33.6	33.9	19.9
No	3470	66.4	66.1	80.1

Cardiovascular Disease

Sexual Orientation by Cardiovascular Disease				
Has a doctor, nurse or other health professional ever told you that you had a myocardial infarction?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	83	3.2	0.4	0.8
No	2618	96.8	99.6	99.2
Sexual Orientation by Cardiovascular Disease				
Has a doctor, nurse or other health professional ever told you that you had coronary heart disease?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	85	3.0	1.7	0
No	2615	97.0	98.3	100
Sexual Orientation by Cardiovascular Disease				
Has a doctor, nurse or other health professional ever told you that you had a stroke?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	200	2.9	0.9	4.8
No	5997	97.1	99.1	95.2

Immunization

Sexual Orientation by Immunization				
A flu shot is an influenza vaccine injected in your arm. During the past 12 months, have you had a flu shot?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	2348	32.4	39.5	37.9
No	3856	67.6	60.5	62.1
Sexual Orientation by Immunization				
During the past 12 months, have you had a flu vaccine that was sprayed in your nose?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	87	1.8	0.2	1.3
No	6116	98.2	99.8	98.7
Sexual Orientation by Immunization				
Have you EVER had a pneumonia shot? A pneumonia shot or pneumococcal vaccine is usually given only once or twice in a person's lifetime and is different from the flu shot? Have you ever had a pneumonia shot?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	1389	21.4	24.5	33.9
No	4211	78.6	75.5	66.1

Disability

Sexual Orientation by Disability				
Are you limited in any way in any activities because of physical, mental or emotional problems?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	1107	15.6	12.0	25.2
No	5055	84.4	88.0	74.8
Sexual Orientation by Disability				
Do you now have any health problem that requires you to use special equipment, such as a cane, a wheelchair, a special bed, or a special telephone?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	573	7.7	4.1	9.3
No	5606	92.3	95.9	90.7

HIV/AIDS

Sexual Orientation by HIV/AIDS				
Have you ever been tested for HIV?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Yes	3009	64.9	90.4	80.4
No	1651	35.1	9.6	19.6
Sexual Orientation by HIV/AIDS				
Ever participated in high-risk behavior risk factor				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
No	2014	94.9	76.4	87.4
Yes	128	5.1	23.6	12.6

Life Satisfaction

Sexual Orientation by Emotional Support and Life Satisfaction				
How often do you get the social and emotional support you need?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Always	2608	46.4	41.4	35.6
Usually	2013	30.0	39.2	30.5
Sometimes	865	14.0	14.9	23.2
Rarely	235	3.9	2.5	6.4
Never	259	5.7	2.0	4.3
Sexual Orientation by Emotional Support and Life Satisfaction				
In general, how satisfied are you with your life?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Very satisfied	2775	45.0	41.9	42.1
Satisfied	2893	49.1	52.5	46.8
Dissatisfied	298	5.0	5.4	8.3
Very dissatisfied	59	0.9	0.2	2.8

Smoking

Sexual Orientation by Smoking				
Smoking status				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Smoke every day	641	11.0	15.1	13.4
Smoke some days	383	6.8	7.6	10.9
Former smoker	1635	21.9	21.1	16.6
Never smoked	3522	60.3	56.2	59.2

Alcohol Consumption

Sexual Orientation by Alcohol Consumption				
Heavy Drinker				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
No	5726	94.8	95.7	92.4
Yes	364	5.2	4.3	7.6
Sexual Orientation by Binge Drinking				
Binge drinkers (males having five or more drinks on one occasion, females having four or more drinks on one occasion)				
No	2986	84.2	83.7	71.4
Yes	470	15.8	16.3	28.6

BMI

Sexual Orientation by Categories of Body Mass Index (BMI)				
BMI Category				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Neither overweight or obese	2791	44.4	51.4	46.2
Overweight	1963	33.5	36.1	24.9
Obese	1228	22.1	12.5	28.8

Physical Activity

Sexual Orientation by Physical Activity				
3 level moderate physical activity category				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Meet recommendations for moderate physical activity	2401	38.6	52.1	46.6
Insufficient activity to meet moderate recommendations	2630	45.3	40.0	45.3
No moderate physical activity	876	16.1	7.9	8.0
Sexual Orientation by Physical Activity				
Vigorous Physical Activity Categories				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Meet recommendations for vigorous physical activity	1822	30.0	54.5	33.7
Insufficient activity to meet vigorous recommendations	1192	21.4	18.4	18.7
No vigorous physical activity	3006	48.7	27.0	47.5
Sexual Orientation by Physical Activity				

Overall Physical Activity Categories				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
Meet recommendations for moderate and vigorous physical activity	1029	16.8	32.3	18.5
Meet recommendations for vigorous physical activity	793	13.7	22.1	15.7
Meet recommendations for moderate physical activity	1372	21.9	20.1	27.0
Insufficient activity to meet moderate or vigorous recommendations	1985	34.7	20.8	32.1
No moderate or vigorous physical activity	710	12.9	4.7	6.7

Healthy Days

Sexual Orientation by Healthy Days				
Now thinking about your physical health, which includes physical illness and injury, for how many days during the past 30 days was your physical health not good?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
None	4001	65.5	68.1	64.3
1-7 days	1428	23.8	26.9	21.0
8-14 days	199	3.2	0.7	5.8
15-30 days	495	7.5	4.2	8.9
Sexual Orientation by Healthy Days				
Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?				
	N	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual/Other
None	4194	67.0	60.2	54.3
1-7 days	1316	22.5	29.4	25.0
8-14 days	206	3.3	3.3	3.3
15-30 days	442	7.2	7.0	17.4

Note: Percentages are weighted according to the District's population

N = Number of respondents

1482 of District respondents did not answer to the sexual orientation question.

***Data not presented if the unweight cell size was <50**